

Wildlife and Countryside Link's position statement for Modernising Government's (Rural) Delivery March 2004

Overview

Wildlife and Countryside Link's interest in the Government's Modernising Rural Delivery process is in the strengthening and renewal of both policy and delivery, bringing about real improvements in achieving environmental enhancement, public engagement and leadership. We have sought to identify the critical issues, strategic outcomes and some of the measures by which Government can deliver these outcomes.

Link agreed with many of the findings of the Rural White Paper Review¹, in particular the observation that "the linkages between the environment and social and economic activity need clarification". Furthermore we agree that "there is still a long way to go until environmental concerns are fully integrated into wider social and economic rural policy agendas (and vice versa)"². We believe that these issues need to be addressed across Government rather than by Defra alone, as they are wider than the rural policy agenda: this is recognised elsewhere in the review which states "the rural affairs agenda must not sit in isolation"³. Link believes that Defra needs to be stronger in advocating protection of the countryside from degradation and inappropriate development. We urge Defra to champion the importance of the countryside as a socio-economic asset and the links between attractive, high quality rural landscapes and successful economic activity.

We agree that there needs to be far better "understanding...(of) the linkages between urban and rural areas"⁴. We do not think however, that Government is reconnecting the consumer or most businesses to the environmental consequences of their actions. This should be a priority across Government as this reconnection could help Government meet environmental, social, health and economic priorities.

Link believes that Government, including Defra, needs to improve its performance with regard to delivering its existing commitments to protect and enhance the countryside, biodiversity, access and the historic environment. Contrary to the statement in the review of the rural white paper "protecting the countryside appears to be ahead of the social and economic agenda"⁵ Link believes that whilst the economy has grown, and other social indicators relating to education and jobs may have improved, biodiversity, landscape, natural resources, animal welfare, countryside access and the historic environment remain under serious pressure and by many measures of quality, diversity and extent, are declining (see Appendix 1). Link calls upon Defra to champion these interests across Government and achieve real improvements in the future.

The prime focus of change should be an enhanced performance across Government against clearly stated outcomes⁶. Link believes effective and enhanced delivery will be a function of

¹ Rural White Paper Review (Summary) 2004

² Rural White Paper Review (Summary) 2004 p4

³ op cit Paragraph 49 p 19

⁴ op cit p 5

⁵ op cit Paragraph 32, p16

⁶ Link has identified strategic outcomes in relation to biodiversity, landscape, marine, natural resources, animal health and welfare, access, the historic environment and overarching issues

appropriate levels of resourcing (capital, revenue, human and financial) of excellent delivery mechanisms (of all types). Better performance must not be risked by employing a simplistic cost-benefit approach.

Link believes that Defra requires a sound evidence base to underpin the development of policy and delivery to equal that of other interests within Government. In particular there is a clear need to provide adequate resources to monitor biodiversity and landscape change.

Link welcomes the proposed creation of an Executive Non Departmental Public Body with independence and authority to assume the responsibilities of English Nature and that part of the Countryside Agency concerned with access and landscape protection and enhancement. There is an opportunity to achieve public benefit in securing both landscape and habitat integrity and enhance the relationship between practical experience of delivery, expert advice, research, and policy advocacy. In addition to responsibility for biodiversity, landscape and access the "integrated agency" should include an urban, marine and coastal remit. A reformed and sharply focussed Countryside Agency with a remit to pursue Rural Proofing across all Government departments could complement the role of a new Agency.

Strategic Outcomes

Link believes that if Defra's restructuring and modernisation of delivery is to be successful, Defra must clearly state its mission in terms of real, tangible improvements to biodiversity, landscape, the marine environment, natural resources, animal welfare, countryside access and the historic environment. The success of policies should be measured in terms of delivery of outcomes, rather than the production of strategies, the establishment of partnerships and processes or the devolution of responsibilities which are all means to an end. In areas where there is not yet sufficient intelligence to articulate clearly outcomes in terms of tangible improvements it will be necessary to state interim or proxy outcomes, such as the definition of policy, which should include the necessary data collection and future establishment of appropriate measurable outcomes.

Biodiversity

Defra, in partnership with other government departments and its agencies, should implement its vision for biodiversity⁷, fulfill its international commitments to halt biodiversity loss by 2010⁸ and meet its national targets for biodiversity, specifically to ensure that:

- 95% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest are in favourable condition by 2010⁹.
- The decline in farmland birds is reversed by 2020¹⁰.
- There is continuing and sustained improvement in the status of terrestrial and marine species and habitats listed on the Biodiversity Action Plan.
- Adaptive strategies are developed to tackle the impact of climate change upon biodiversity.

Landscape

Defra should embrace and pursue a landscape scale approach to all environmental, natural resource, landscape, biodiversity and access conservation and enhancement. As a matter of urgency, Defra should forge strategic links between the human benefits of securing tranquility and the fundamental requirement to prevent and reverse habitat fragmentation:

- Defra should develop indicators to measure change in the quality and character of the countryside¹¹ as set out in the Rural White Paper and in particular the credible measurement of tranquility.

⁷ As outlined in *Working with the Grain of nature: a biodiversity strategy for England*, Defra 2002

⁸ Presidency Conclusions of the Göteborg European Council, 15-16 June 2001, SN 200/1/01 REV 1

⁹ Service Delivery Agreement 2003-06, Defra 2003

¹⁰ Service Delivery Agreement 2003-06, Defra 2003

- The protection and enhancement of nationally designated landscapes should be affirmed across all Government departments and similarly the duties arising from Section 62 (Environment Act 1995) and Section 85 (CroW Act 2000).
- The effective protection of locally valued landscape should be secured through the development of Landscape Character Assessment as an effective means of limiting development as well as influencing its location and design.

Marine

The Government should implement its vision for clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas through an ecosystem-based approach to managing the marine environment. In particular it should secure:

- Effective protection for marine wildlife and maritime cultural heritage
- A holistic approach to managing all marine industries and activities (under UK jurisdiction) based on marine spatial planning
- Sustainable use of exploited marine resources (including fish stocks) based on the precautionary principle, with steps in place to minimize incidental capture/killing/ disturbance of non-target species or habitats.
- Comprehensive and accessible data on marine wildlife and maritime cultural heritage
- Greater consideration and integration of environmental concerns in the licensing of marine activities that are currently unsustainable including fisheries, oil & gas and marine aggregate extraction.

Natural resources

Defra and other government departments should seek to promote recovery and implement sustainable use of natural resources, so that they can support future generations:

- Natural resources should be recovered to sustainable levels
- Good water quality, as defined under European law, is achieved for all of our waters by 2015¹² and further deterioration in the quality of our rivers, lakes and seas is prevented
- Stop damage to important wetland wildlife sites and restore them to favourable condition by 2010¹³.
- Deterioration in the condition of the UK's soils is halted and good ecological and physical condition of our soils is restored.
- Greenhouse gas emissions are reduced by 20% by 2010, including those from aviation.
- The National Air Quality strategy is implemented.

Animal Health and Welfare

We welcome the Animal health and welfare strategy as we see such a strategy with clear goals and indicators as implicit in any progress to improve animal welfare. Animal welfare must be given a high priority and not subsumed under the umbrella of animal health. Health is a part of welfare and hence the two entities are inextricably linked: when an animal's health is poor, so is its welfare, but poor welfare does not always imply poor health. To improve Animal health and welfare we would like to see in place:

- A sustainable strategy to address major problems such as BSE or FMD
- A sustainable strategy to address everyday problems such as lameness in sheep and cattle
- Improved welfare within farming systems achieved in part through a system of licensing to ensure that those that look after farmed animals and wildlife have the necessary skill and experience

¹¹ Rural White Paper, DETR and MAFF 2000

¹² Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC)

¹³ As required by the PSA on SSSI condition

- Proper monitoring of animal movements
- Farm inspections carried out at sufficient frequency to ensure compliance with farm animal welfare provisions
- Defra supported Assurance schemes requiring a Veterinary Health plan and enhanced levels of welfare, not just baseline standards

Access

Defra and other government departments should implement the commitments within the Rural White paper to an improved network of rights of way and better opportunities for disadvantaged and town dwellers to visit and enjoy the countryside¹⁴: In particular it should secure improvements so that:

- More people visit the countryside for the purposes of recreation, especially on foot
- A more diverse range of people visits the countryside, including visitors from lower income groups and ethnic minorities, residents of the inner cities and visitors with disabilities
- The extent and quality of public access to the countryside is increased: all public rights of way are easy to use, well managed, maintained and well marked; the statutory rights of access to open country are implemented effectively and the statutory right of access is extended to include coast and woods.
- There are publicly dedicated green spaces within easy walking distance, i.e. 300 metres¹⁵, of everyone's home
- There is appropriate access to marine and coastal areas

Historic environment

Although the lead responsibility for the historic environment lies within DCMS, Defra has a critical role in safeguarding our rural historic heritage and its context. We suggest that clear policy strengthened by a PSA would help to achieve sustainable management of the historic rural environment

Overarching

Defra and other government departments should deliver sustainable consumption and production. Direct measures are required to tackle the “rebound effect” where efficiency gains are outweighed by increased consumption. Through measures including education and awareness raising Defra should ensure that:

- The public are adopting sustainable consumption patterns and levels.
- There is accessible data on the sustainability of public sector delivery at all levels of Government.
- Businesses are adopting sustainable production and service practices.

Principles

Principles for cross departmental delivery

Link recognises that many issues cut across the responsibilities of departments and that this will influence delivery. For Defra and the whole of government to achieve its desired outcomes, clear delivery principles should be at the heart of all relevant government policy.

- The major challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, sustainable land, water, marine protection and management are addressed by all Government policies. There is sufficient policy capacity within Defra and across other government departments and the new agencies to address these challenges.

¹⁴ Rural White Paper 2000 p133

¹⁵ English Nature's Accessible Greenspace Standard 2004

- The principles of environmental protection and natural heritage protection and conservation, access and accessibility are embedded within all Government policies and delivery.
- There is a streamlined, co-ordinated approach across Government's activities to ensure that the delivery of outcomes towards these principles is maximized
- The benefits to society and the economy of a high-quality environment and good public access are championed by Government.
- Sound evidence underpins the development of policy and delivery of these policies and there is sufficient capacity to gather and appraise evidence. In particular there is a clear need to provide adequate resources to monitor biodiversity and landscape change.
- Civil servants within all Government departments are well informed in the principles of sustainability
- Implementation of regulation is improved; a clear enforcement strategy is developed and is regarded as a positive and enabling culture.
- The "polluter pays principle" is implemented: appropriate fiscal measures are evaluated and applied.
- The environment, natural heritage, archaeological heritage, access and accessibility and animal welfare are all safeguarded to standards agreed by a wide spectrum of stakeholders.
- The same minimum standards and resources for the protection and conservation of natural and cultural heritage are applied to the marine as to the terrestrial environment, whilst the unique nature and special requirements of the marine environment are recognised.
- Outcomes are assured however Government departments are reorganised.

Principles for Defra's delivery

- Defra and its agencies have clear, specific and formalised roles for influencing and advising all departments and agencies.
- Defra and its agencies have clear outcome focused roles in cross government and regional machinery for policy and delivery.
- Defra and its agencies and partners focus on promoting a true integrated approach to land management and land use

Measures

Link believes that further measures, or the development of existing measures, are needed for Defra to deliver.

- A "pyramid" of regulation and support, of all kinds, is put in place to ensure that basic environmental, public access and animal welfare standards are met on all farmed and forested land and to encourage higher standards across large areas.
- The CAP is further reformed to provide public funding only for public benefit: The environmental benefits of CAP and AES reform are realised through the full range of biodiversity, landscape and access protection and promotion.
- Land management funding is secured in the long term on a scale to conserve effectively the continuum of the wider countryside.
- Land managers are always given site specific integrated sustainable land management advice i.e. integrated advice on environment, landscape, animal health and welfare, heritage and resource conservation, access and recreation.
- Special places, such as National Parks, AONBs, NNRs and SSSIs are managed to maximise delivery of their special attributes, their biodiversity, landscape, heritage and opportunities for appropriate public enjoyment as well as recognising the need to manage the impact of activity adjacent to such places.
- A Code of Good Conservation Practice with regard to the historic environment for Agriculture (and rural development) is developed and adhered to.

- Greater emphasis is given to the Codes of Good Agricultural Practice, for Water Air and Soil, which set basic guidelines for farmers to follow.
- Explicit links are established between support for land management and public access benefits within sustainable travelling distance of settlements.
- Cross compliance and the farm advisory service ensure compliance with farm animal welfare provisions and accurate monitoring of animal movements.
- Measures including comprehensive legislation are implemented for improved protection of marine wildlife and cultural heritage and effective management of the human impacts upon the marine environment.

This statement is supported by the following organisations:

Bat Conservation Trust
 British Mountaineering Council
 Buglife, the Invertebrate Conservation Trust
 Butterfly Conservation
 Campaign to Protect Rural England
 Council for British Archaeology
 Council for National Parks
 Friends of the Earth
 Herpetological Conservation Trust
 Marine Connection
 Marine Conservation Society
 National Federation of Badger Groups
 Open Spaces Society
 Plantlife
 Ramblers' Association
 Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
 Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
 Shark Trust
 Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society
 Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust
 The Wildlife Trusts
 Woodland Trust
 World Society for the Protection of Animals
 WWF-UK
 Youth Hostels Association

Appendix 1

The State of England's Environment

Biodiversity Impacts

- 98% of wild flower meadows, 75% of open heaths, 96% of open peat bogs and 305,000 km (190,000 miles) of hedgerows have been lost since 1950. *Back from the brink*, (Plantlife 2000)
- Only 45.1% of SSSIs in England are in favourable condition (English Nature 2004)
- "The worst-hit counties in England lost on average one native flower every year throughout the 20th century." *Where have all the flowers gone? Loss and decline of species at a local level* (Plantlife, 2000)
- 34% of butterfly species have declined in range by over 50%, with far greater losses at a population level (State of Britain's Butterflies 2000).
- The tree sparrow has declined by 95%, the corn bunting by 88% and grey partridge by 86%, skylark numbers have dropped by 52% and yellowhammer by 53% over the period 1970 to 1999 (*State of the UK's Birds 2002*, RSPB, BTO, WWT, JNCC)

Landscape

- There was a 21% loss in the extent of tranquil areas between early 1960s and 1993
- The area of dark sky declined by 24% between 1993 and 2000
- National Parks and AONBs are threatened by a growing number of major road schemes and quarrying and other development proposals

Animal Health and Welfare

- A key lesson from the Food and Mouth outbreak was the need to increase monitoring of movements of animals and farm inspections.
- Information from the SVS indicates that the level of non-compliance with farm animal welfare provisions has increased in recent years.

Marine

- Only 29% of reported fish stocks around the UK were assessed to be within safe biological limits. *Fish stocks around the UK within biological safe limits: 1998-2002*, (Defra, 2003)
- There is only one marine nature reserves (MNRs), Lundy, directly under Defra's jurisdiction.
- There are still no offshore SACs in place. Existing marine (mainly coastal) SACs are multi-use areas rather than nature reserves, and are hence being degraded by a range of activities, such as dredging, coastal defence and port development.
- Offshore activities such as marine aggregate dredging, offshore wind-farm development, and oil & gas extraction are being licensed with inadequate consideration of their environmental impacts.
- In spite of the protection of cetaceans under national and international legislation, large and unsustainable numbers are killed through fisheries bycatch in UK waters every year e.g. 600 harbour porpoises were killed in UK set-net fisheries in the North Sea in the year 2000 (A biodiversity strategy for England, Measuring progress: baseline assessment. Defra 2003)
- Over 50% of shark species endemic to British waters are IUCN redlist species. However, with the exception of the Basking shark, none of these species are offered statutory protection within UK waters, nor do they benefit from management through the enforcement of fishing quotas.

Access

- 41% of paths were not easy to use in 2003, *Figures from those submitted to the Audit Commission (BV178) performance indicator In 2003/03*
- Walkers can expect to come across a serious problem every 1¼ miles (2km) *The Countryside Agency's Rights of Way Survey 2000*

Cultural landscapes

- almost all Countryside Agency's Countryside Character areas have been shown to be under threat from intensification of agriculture (Haines Young et al, 2000)
- Agriculture has been the single biggest cause of uncontrolled loss among archaeological sites, *Ripping up History English Heritage 2003*.
- Fewer than 10 of 1,200 burial mounds in Essex survive as earthworks, 94% of East Midlands ridge and furrow have been destroyed by ploughing, only 2 out of 39 Bronze Age metalwork hoards recovered from Norfolk in the last 30 years had not been disturbed by agriculture

Natural resources

- Soil degradation caused an increase in rainfall entering rivers by up to 20% in the catchments which flooded in 2000. (SSLRC, 2001).
- 2.3 million tonnes of agricultural soils were lost through erosion between 1995 and 1998.
- Agriculture accounted for 8.1% of national emissions of greenhouse gases 1995-7 (OECD, 2001), 37% of methane and 52% of nitrous oxide emissions
- Water Companies spend £120m p.a. removing pesticides from water courses (Pretty et al, 2000)
- Many English estuaries are at risk of eutrophication. *Marine Update 50: Eutrophication and European Marine sites*, WWF, 2001